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The Best Call
A 10-Minute Comedy
by
Pat Pattan

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The Best Call
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CHARACTERS
1W / 1M

SUSAN BASSET: A woman making cold calls for a Department store to potential credit card customers

DAN SILVA: The man on the other end of her latest call

TIME

The 1980’s
The Best Call
by Pat Pattan

SETTING: The stage is split. Stage Right has a desk and chair, representing a home office. Stage Left; a hallway table and small chair. On top of the table is a phone attached to a land line, a note pad and a pen. There is a kitchen off.

AT RISE: SUSAN BASSET sits at her desk Stage Right. There is an open phone book and a few loose pages of paper on the desk. She has a land line phone in one hand and a pen in the other. The phone on Stage Left is ringing. She taps her pen on the desk impatiently.

SUSAN

(Imitating the ringing)

Ring, ring, ring—I know this is going to be another "no answer". It figures—I told the store nobody stays home on a Friday night, but they didn’t listen. So now I’m stuck sitting here while everybody else is out having a good time.

(She looks at her watch)

Speaking of time, it’s 7:15 already. I can’t call after 8, but if I make it quick I may be able to get three more calls in.

(She checks the phone book.)
I’d better take a look at this call’s name - D. S. Silva. What the heck does D. S. stand for? I don’t know if it’s a male or female. Everybody knows that trick. Women don’t want people to know that they’re living alone. I tried it myself, but it didn’t work. I never got so many crank calls in my life. This is 1980—by now you’d think somebody would invent a way to tell who the caller is before you pick it up. But what am I saying? I’d be out of a job. Nobody wants to talk to a telemarketer. It's going to be a woman... Ring, ring, ring—she probably has a date and I'm sitting here—

All lights up. DAN, wearing an apron, is standing with the phone in one hand and a pot holder in the other. He looks nervously behind the screen.

DAN

Hello?

Taken by surprise, SUSAN straightens up and prepares for business by picking up her pen.

SUSAN

Hello, my name is Susan Basset and I'm calling for Shirmers Department Store. I—
DAN
Dan Silva here. Oh, no—Mt. Vesuvius just erupted!

*DAN drops the receiver on the table and runs behind the screen. SUSAN holds the phone away from her ear as it clunks. The muffled sound of a pan lid is heard as it hits the floor.*

SUSAN
What the heck is going on there? I’m on with a nutcase who thinks he’s in Italy.

*DAN returns, stretching the phone cord so he can see behind the screen.*

DAN
Can we make it quick?

SUSAN
(Stammering)
I...I called to see if you—

DAN
The lava is reaching the floor!

*DAN drops the receiver with a clunk again and runs behind the screen. SUSAN holds the receiver out and stares at it, screwing up her face.*

SUSAN
I think I should hang up and call 911. This guy either needs the fire department or a psychiatrist. I’m glad I’m on this end.

He comes back with a mop in one hand and a sponge in the other and balances the receiver on his shoulder. At the sound of action, she perks up again.

DAN
(Out of breath)
Sorry about all this...I got it under control. It’s a mess, but I’ll deal with it later. You were saying?

He plops on the chair, dropping the mop and sponge.

SUSAN
What did you do with the dog?
DAN
What dog?

SUSAN
You know, the Saint Bernard that came with his little keg to rescue you from Mt. Vesuvius.

DAN
(Snorting)
Glad to see one of us has a sense of humor. I wish there were a keg—I might need it for strength when I start cleaning up. Now where were we?

SUSAN
You were all over the place; I was trying to explain why I called.

DAN
Okay, give me your spiel.

SUSAN
I’m calling for Shirmers Department Store. I—

DAN
Let me guess. You called to sell me a new stove. Where do I sign?

SUSAN
I’m not selling stoves, I’m introducing the new “Silver Shirmers” Credit Card.

DAN
You’re too late. I cut up all my cards when my wife divorced me. I don’t need one.

SUSAN
This one’s different. You get lots of perks with it. They give—

DAN
She was the start of all my problems.

SUSAN
Who?

DAN
My ex-wife. She did all the cooking. I relied on her; never learned how to cook.

*SUSAN puts her pen down and crosses her arms.*

SUSAN
And how is that her fault?
DAN

(Crossing his arms)
Hey, you’re trying to sell me something. You’re supposed to be on my side.

SUSAN
Thanks for reminding me. Now, back to Shirmers.

SUSAN straightens up and picks up the pen.

DAN
It wasn’t all my ex-wife’s fault though.

SUSAN
How refreshing—a man who admits his mistakes.

DAN
I have to blame my sister too. She spoiled me with her home cooking.

SUSAN
Let me get this straight. The actions of your ex-wife and your sister were the underling cause for Mt. Vesuvius to erupt?

DAN
Most emphatically, yes! They got me so used to good food that microwaving a can of franks an’ beans just didn’t do it for me anymore. I had to try to cook for myself. Tonight I found a recipe for short ribs and peppers over rice. I started with the rice.

SUSAN
That sounds easy enough.

DAN
You’d think. Here’s where things went wrong. When I saw how much water there was and how little rice, I thought the package directions were wrong. I wanted a lot, so I threw in an extra cup of rice.

SUSAN
(Rolling her eyes)
Rice expands.

DAN
I wish I had known that before the lid blew off.

SUSAN stifles a laugh.

SUSAN
So that’s what the crash was. Did it hit the ceiling?
DAN
No—but it missed the skylight by a hair.

SUSAN (Condescending)
Cooking rice successfully is one of the most complicated feats. That's why the inventor of Minute Rice became very rich.

DAN
That's like using potato buds. It’s cheating. I want the real thing. No box mixes for me.

SUSAN
It just takes a little practice, that’s all. Maybe you should invest in a rice cooker. They’re kind of foolproof.

DAN
You must think I’m really stupid for not knowing how to cook rice.

*SUSAN nods her head up and down in agreement.*

DAN, Continuing
You see, my wife left me two years ago, and it kind of devastated me. I didn't want to live alone, so I moved in with my sister and her family. What with eating out and her home cooking, I was spoiled. When they moved out of state last month, I was forced to fend for myself. I wish they had cooking classes for boys like they did for girls when I went to school.

SUSAN
Schools don’t offer required cooking classes any more - budget cuts. Boys and girls learn how to build bird houses.

DAN
Hey don’t knock bird houses—that’s what I made.

SUSAN
Good for you. At least the birds are well fed.

DAN
I’m not—I've taken my belt in two notches since I started cooking.

SUSAN
Maybe you should open up a cooking school for people trying to lose a few pounds.

DAN
Good idea. What do you think I should call it?
SUSAN
Well, considering this attempt, how about “Disastrous Dan's Weight Loss Cookbook”?

They laugh.

DAN
Yeah, the sub-title could be: “Not for the Feint of Heart”.

Another laugh.

SUSAN
That’s good, Dan—not bad for an on-the-spot collaboration. How about we put in some line drawings? My favorite cookbooks are the ones with illustrations. With Mt. Vesuvius on the cover, it could be a landslide sale!

DAN
Very punny! I like the way you think. How about being my publicist? But, I guess you wouldn’t have time for that. Didn’t you say you worked in a department store?

SUSAN
I don’t work in Shirmers, I work for them making calls to introduce people to their new "Silver Shirmers" Credit Cards. I—

DAN
You mean you work out of your home? How much do you make for each call?

SUSAN
Twenty bucks, but that’s only if I sell a card.

DAN
Don’t tell me you support yourself on this—I’m sorry, you’re probably married and padding the family wallet a little. Go on, I won’t interrupt any more.

SUSAN rolls her eyes and clasps her hands heavenward.

SUSAN
That’s okay, it’s my turn for a little personal stuff. I’m divorced too and I am trying to pad my wallet a little, except that I’m the only family here.

DAN
This doesn’t seem like too dependable a job, especially when you get people like me on the phone.

SUSAN
You got that right. I just spent three hours tonight and I made one sale. Thankfully, I only have to do this until September.
I don’t get it. If you have another job, why do you do this?

Because I work with a school ten months of the year and I eat twelve months.

Ah, so you’re a teacher. I always thought they had it easy working only ten months a year.

Think again. Look up the average teacher’s salary.

What do you teach?

Promise you won’t laugh.

I’m holding my hand over my heart as we speak. (Demonstrating)

(Laughing heartily)
I teach advanced culinary arts at a training school for chefs.

What! Now I feel really out-classed! How could you keep a straight face while I was describing my debacle?

I’ve been trained to muffle my laughter.

I wish I could have seen your face. Somebody should invent visual phones.

I’m sure that will happen in a couple of years. I’m not looking forward to it though. I don’t often answer the phone with full make-up on.

Come to think of it, I don’t either.

THEY both laugh.
SUSAN
You’re pretty funny. I’m almost feeling cheery after feeling sorry for myself for sacrificing my Friday night.

DAN
I suppose your boyfriend was put off about that.

SUSAN
I don’t have one at the moment, but nice fishing, Dan.

DAN clears his throat and sits straighter. SUSAN twirls her hair around her finger.

DAN
Obvious, wasn’t it; back to topic: You probably have a dozen cookbooks on the market, since you’re a culinary expert.

SUSAN
I wish—recipes I have, ideas I have. I even have photos of my students’ creations, but I’m afraid it will never get published.

DAN
Wait a minute. You have an idea for a book of recipes that your students created, plus photos. Do you know how valuable that is? You’re sitting on a gold mine!

SUSAN
I’m glad you think so, but it’s not that easy. Now that you know all about me; back to topic: I need to know if you want to sign up for the card or—

DAN
Why not?

**This is Not the End of the Play**

**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**